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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to develop a theoretically and statistically sound measure of neighborhood affiliation for use with low-income urban youth. The aim was to develop a measure that can be used in future studies to predict community violence exposure among adolescents from inner-city neighborhoods. Participants were 167 adolescents from a public high school in Baltimore (Maryland). They completed a self-report scale, a measure of exposure to violence, a risk behavior survey, a demographic questionnaire, and the newly developed measure, "Me and My Neighborhood," which was based on other measures in the adult literature assessing neighborhood cohesion and reports from focus groups and clinical work in the community of interest. Findings support the reliability of this new measure of neighborhood affiliation. Future studies are planned to replicate reliability findings, demonstrate convergent and discriminate validity, and examine the association of neighborhood affiliation and exposure to violence among inner-city youth. (Contains 4 tables and 27 references.) (SLD)

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DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADOLESCENT NEIGHBORHOOD AFFILIATION MEASURE

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INTRODUCTION

Spurred by the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989), many aspects of the effects of neighborhoods on child and adolescent development have been investigated (e.g., Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Burton et al., 1998; Coulton et al., 1995; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Sampson, 1992, 1993). Nevertheless, no work has specifically explored the construct of neighborhood affiliation, or attachment to one's neighborhood. It is possible that neighborhood affiliation may be a risk or protective factor related to exposure to and participation in violent behavior.

Theoretically, attachment to or affiliation with one's neighborhood should have a positive effect on developmental outcome, through greater social involvement, connection and support. But in inner city neighborhoods where poverty, economic and racial segregation, crime, drugs and violence are prevalent (e.g., Steinberg, 1985; Massey & Denton, 1993), strong neighborhood affiliation may have a negative effect on development, through greater association with peers who participate in gang activities and violent behavior. In contrast, weak neighborhood affiliation may translate into less engagement in proximal peer activities or "hanging out" and consequently less exposure to violent behavior. Thus, weak neighborhood affiliation may be a protective factor for low income urban youth.

The special significance of neighborhood affiliation

In much of the research on neighborhood effects, neighborhood context has been assessed through census data, resident perceptions or parental perceptions (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993; Coulton, Korbin, Su, & Chow, 1995; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Massey, Gross, & Eggers, 1991; Sampson, Earls & Raudenbush, 1997). We propose that in urban contexts adolescents' ideas and feelings about their neighborhoods are very important to understanding their risk for community violence exposure.

Some researchers have found that length of time living in a neighborhood increases risk for

exposure to violence (Richters & Martinez, 1993) and engagement in violent behavior (Paschall and Hubbard, 1998). Similarly, other work has found lower levels of antisocial behavior among youth who report low neighborhood cohesion, low involvement in the neighborhood, and little dissatisfaction with their neighborhoods (Seidman et al., 1998). It seems these 'disconnected' youths may be protected by their lack of involvement in potentially dangerous neighborhood contexts.

While no measure of adolescent neighborhood affiliation exists, some research has focused on neighborhood cohesion. Although different in important ways, neighborhood cohesion is similar in that it reflects the degree to which members of the same community know and associate with one another and are willing to provide help when needed. Measures of neighborhood cohesion have assessed factors such as an individual's sense of community, his or her positive feelings regarding their neighborhood, the significance of their neighborhood, shared values within their neighborhood, and an individual's willingness to participate in neighborhood projects (Buckner, 1988; Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman & Chavis, 1990; Pretty, Andrewes & Collett, 1994; Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997). Indeed, neighborhood cohesion has been predictive of positive outcomes, including lower rates of violence exposure and community violence among adults (Sampson et al., 1997).

For the purposes of the current study, our conceptualization of neighborhood affiliation was somewhat different. First, our conceptualization focused specifically on adolescents. Second, our conceptualization focused not only on one's sense of community within neighborhoods, but also on one's desire to "stand up" for the neighborhood in conflict situations and emotional attachment to one's neighborhood.

This conceptualization stemmed, in part, from clinical work and informal focus groups with inner-city youth, revealing some strong neighborhood allegiances, manifested in a willingness to represent and protect members of one's own neighborhood when confronted by members of another neighborhood, regardless of the basis of the conflict. Viewed within the context of the inner city, where

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crime and violence predominate, and particularly in our own city, where neighborhood-related violence among youth was a pressing problem, we expected neighborhood affiliation to act as a risk factor in predicting negative outcomes for youth. Given the high priority afforded the peer group in adolescence, we hypothesized that in the context of high crime, high violence neighborhoods where the availability of negative peer influences is great, affiliation within the neighborhood peer group would increase the danger of youths' exposure to and engagement in violence.

The goal of the present study is to develop a theoretically and statistically sound measure of neighborhood affiliation for use with low-income urban youth.

It is the hope that this measure can be used in future studies to predict community violence exposure among adolescents from inner-city neighborhoods.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 167 adolescents (107 female, 60 male) from a public high school in Baltimore, MD. Participants were recruited through presentations in classrooms and class meetings. Eighty-six percent of respondents were African American and 12% were Caucasian. Ages ranged from 14 to 19, with a median age of 16.8 years. Forty-eight percent of participants were from the 9th and 10th grades, and 52% from the 12th grade.

Procedure

Parental consent forms were distributed in several 9th and 10th grade homeroom classes and during a senior class meeting. A short description of the study was given when consent forms were distributed. As an incentive for participation, students who completed the survey were entered in a raffle

to win gift certificates to a popular clothing store, as well as water bottles and pens with the local university insignia. Participation was optional.

In total, 5 measures were given to students to complete: Me and My Neighborhood, the Achenbach Youth Self-Report Scale (Achenbach, 1991), the Exposure to Violence Screening Measure (Weist, Myers, Warner, Dorsey, & Varghese, 1996), the Centers for Disease Control -Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Kann, Kolbe & Collins, 1993) and a demographic questionnaire. Administration sessions were directed by graduate students or one of the authors and were held in homerooms or the cafeteria. Administration sessions lasted about 45 minutes.

'Me and My Neighborhood' Questionnaire

Items for the measure of neighborhood affiliation came from two sources: 1) other measures in the adult literature assessing neighborhood cohesion; or 2) focus groups and clinical work in the community of interest. Initially, a thorough search of the literature uncovered a few items, embedded in measures which assessed neighborhood cohesion among adults (e.g. Buckner, 1988; Skjaeveland, Garline, & Maeland, 1996). Based on experience with the target population, 12 items were borrowed or adapted from these existing adult measures and 10 were newly created. Table 1 lists the original 22-items and their sources. Following all analyses (described below) the final 9-item version included five items which were either borrowed or adapted from Buckner (1988) and four items which were newly created (see Table 4 for final version).

RESULTS

In order to ensure that the measure was statistically sound and reliable, several rounds of analyses concerning item statistics and item relationships were conducted. As suggested by convention, we created at least twice as many items as we wanted in our final measure. We also collected data from over five times as many subjects (N=167) as there were variables (N=22). Overall, there were four main

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scale attributes we wanted to assess: item difficulty, item total correlations, factor structure and reliability. Each attribute is described below.

Item difficulty

Item difficulty refers to how respondents typically respond to specific questions. Questions that yield skewed response patterns should be eliminated, as they indicate that a question is either too difficult (in the case of factual scales) or that a question is too specialized. In the current questionnaire, no questions had skewed response patterns.

Item total correlations

The goal of item total correlations is to identify questions that contribute to the common construct and eliminate those that do not. Corrected correlations above .30 are usually considered acceptable. On the current questionnaire, item-total correlations of two items fell below the traditional r=.30 inclusion criteria, suggesting that these items were not adequately related to the underlying test construct. These items were removed. Remaining items are shown in Table 2.

Factor structure

The goal of factor analysis was to investigate homogeneity of items and ensure that a final scale would contain items that truly measure the same construct. Since this scale is a new measure and thought to represent to the best of our knowledge items which tap neighborhood affiliation among youth, principal components analysis with a varimax rotation was chosen. A principal components method of factor analysis assumes that variables are measured without error and that the total variance in scores is accounted for by the factors. Items were eliminated if they: 1) loaded $\leq$.30 on a factor; 2) loaded >.50 on more than one factor; or 3) had factor loadings on two factors that differed by $\leq$.20.

The 20-items remaining after item-total correlations were subjected to principal components factor analysis to further check scale homogeneity. This first analysis revealed three factors, but two items did not load adequately (items 8 and 19). These items were eliminated. The second iteration

revealed two underlying factors, yet still several items did not load adequately (items 1,5, 18, 21). The third iteration of the factor analysis again revealed two underlying factors. All items loaded adequately, however only three items comprised this scale (items 2, 3, 7). To reliably assess a construct a scale or sub-scale should contain at least 4-5 items. Further inspection of this factor revealed an unacceptably low alpha reliability (α =.66). In addition, an examination of these items revealed no conceptual basis for these items to form a separate factor. For these reasons, these three items were eliminated. A fourth principal components analysis with the remaining nine items resulted in one factor (Table 3).

Reliability

The reliability of the 9-item factor was good (α =.92), indicating that these items measured the same construct.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study support the reliability of this new measure of neighborhood affiliation (Table 4). New directions for this measure are to replicate reliability findings with new samples, demonstrate test-retest reliability, demonstrate convergent and discriminate validity with other measures, and to apply this measure to further understanding how neighborhood contexts affect child and adolescent development. In particular, we plan to examine the association of neighborhood affiliation with violence exposure among inner-city youth.

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Table 1. Initial 22-items

Items	*Source*
1. I feel strongly attached to this neighborhood.	Adapted from Skjaeveland et al. (1996)
2. I don't feel at home in this neighborhood. (R)	Borrowed from Skjaeveland et al. (1996)
3. I would have better contacts with friends, family etc., if I lived in another part of town. (R)	Borrowed from Skjaeveland et al. (1996)
4. Overall, I really like living in my neighborhood.	Adapted from Buckner (1988)
5. I feel like I belong to this neighborhood.	Borrowed from Buckner (1988)
6. The friendships and connections I have with people in my neighborhood mean a lot to me.	Adapted from Buckner (1988)
7. Given a chance, I would move out of this neighborhood. (R)	Adapted from Buckner (1988)
8. If the people in my neighborhood were planning an event, I'd think of it as something 'we' were doing rather than 'they' were doing.	Adapted from Buckner (1988)
9. The neighborhood I live in is a big part of who I am.	Newly created
10. I feel loyal to the people in my neighborhood.	Borrowed from Buckner (1988)
11. I think of myself as the same as people who live in my neighborhood.	Adapted from Buckner (1988)
12. Living in this neighborhood gives me a feeling of belonging.	Adapted from Buckner (1988)
13. Most of my friends live in my neighborhood.	Newly created
14. I think I agree with most people in my neighborhood about what is important in life.	Borrowed from Buckner (1988)
15. The neighborhood I live in is not important to the kind of person I am. (R)	Newly created
16. I spend most of my free time in the neighborhood where I live.	Newly created
17. My neighborhood means more to me than school, church, or family.	Newly created
18. I know most of the people in my neighborhood.	Newly created
19. I fit in with neighbors.	Newly created
20. Relationships with neighbors mean a lot to me.	Newly created
21. I like living in my neighborhood.	Newly created
22. If there is trouble, I will represent my neighborhood.	Newly created

(R)= reverse scored item

Table 2. Item-total correlations

Items	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
1	76.5	.65	.93
2	75.2	.44	.94
3	75.6	.44	.94
4	76.1	.72	.93
5	76.7	.83	.93
6	76.6	.71	.93
7	77.0	.58	.93
8	76.8	.53	.94
9	77.7	.72	.93
10	77.3	.76	.93
11	77.6	.69	.93
12	77.3	.81	.93
13	76.9	.68	.93
14	77.2	.60	.94
15	76.3	.20*	.94
16	77.1	.59	.94
17	78.9	.27*	.94
18	75.6	.55	.94
19	76.4	.69	.93
20	77.4	.64	.93
21	76.5	.77	.93
22	77.3	.67	.93

*excluded from further analyses

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Table 3. Summary Statistics for 9-item Neighborhood Affiliation Measure, One-Factor Solution

Total Variance Explained

Factor	*Initial Eigenvalues Total*	*% of Variance*	*Cumulative %*
1	5.50	61.05	61.05
2	.69	7.70	68.76
3	.62	6.82	75.59
4	.52	5.74	81.33
5	.47	5.22	86.54
6	.40	4.42	90.96
7	.39	4.23	95.19
8	.27	3.00	98.19
9	.16	1.81	100.00

Factor Loadings, Unrotated Factor Matrix[1]

	Factor 1
Friendships (1)	.79
Big part of me (2)	.80
Feel loyal (3)	.82
Same as neighbors (4)	.80
Sense of belonging (5)	.88
Friends live in neighborhood (6)	.74
Agree with neighbors (7)	.75
Spend free time (8)	.68
Trouble (9)	.77

[1] Matrix could not be rotated since only one factor was extracted.

Table 4. Final 9-item Neighborhood Affiliation Measure

Me and My Neighborhood Questionnaire

We would like to know how you feel about the neighborhood where you live. Please read each statement below, and decide how much each statement is true for you. Circle the number that corresponds to how true the statement is for you.

1. **The friendships and connections I have with people in my neighborhood mean a lot to me.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

2. **The neighborhood I live in is a big part of who I am.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

3. **I feel loyal to the people in my neighborhood.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

4. **I think of myself as the same as people who live in my neighborhood.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

5. **Living in this neighborhood gives me a feeling of belonging.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

6. **Most of my friends live in my neighborhood.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

7. **I think I agree with most people in my neighborhood about what is important in life.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

8. **I spend most of my free time in the neighborhood where I live.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

9. **If there is trouble, I will represent my neighborhood.**
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all true somewhat true very true

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